

March 11, 2010

Dear esteemed Members of the Labor Committee,

My name is Vincent Fusco. I represent the approximately 370 members of the Hartford Fire Fighters Association and serve as the Legislative Chair for the Uniformed Professional Fire Fighters Association of CT. I come before you today to speak against the proposed changes to the Municipal Employees Relations Act that are contained in Proposed Bill 5062. This bill would dramatically affect both Unions and Municipalities ability to resolve disputes and obtain fair and equitable Collective Bargaining Agreements. The current system that is in place provides for an efficient and effective process.

The proposed Bill would remove the current three arbitrator system and replace it with a sole arbitrator appointed by the Board of Arbitration and Mediation. The current system provides for a Labor Arbitrator selected by the Union, a Management Arbitrator selected by the Municipality and a Neutral Arbitrator agreed upon by both parties. This system ensures that either side is able to select an arbitrator that they feel will understand and represent their interest. The Arbitrator for either side better understands the issues affecting their side can provide some clarification for the Neutral. This saves time on the process and ensures all perspectives are addressed.

The use of a three Arbitrator panel also is more balanced and less likely to fall to the effects of political pressure. A sole arbitrator system would be much more vulnerable to the effect of the political climate at the time. This would result in a process that failed to look at the whole picture and one that would not address long term issues. The result would be detrimental to both the Unions and the Municipalities.

Arbitration is not a desired outcome by either Unions or Municipalities. It is an avenue of last resort and one that is never taken lightly. The current system has proven to be fair and balanced. Each side has an opportunity to present their case and can be confident that their positions will be given proper consideration. The process will only be harmed if it is changed to a Sole Arbitrator system.

On behalf of the 370 members of the Hartford Fire Fighters and the Professional Firefighters across this state I urge you to reject this bill and to protect the process that has proven its value over the years. Thank you for your time.

Vincent Fusco